

~~TOP SECRET~~

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

4 December 1956

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STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 92-56

SUBJECT: Some Intelligence Questions Related to Possible US Action in the Event of a Soviet Resort to Force Against the Gomulka Regime*

1. The NSC Planning Board has a mandate to study a possible US course of action in the event of a Soviet resort to military force against the Gomulka regime. This is contained in the following paragraph from NSC 5616/2, "Interim US Policy on Developments in Poland and Hungary," 19 November 1956:*

"15. Studies should immediately be made to determine whether, if the USSR uses military force to repress the Gomulka regime or to reverse a further trend toward national independence, and if the Polish regime resists and makes a timely request to the UN, the United States should be prepared to support any UN action, including

* This memorandum was requested by the D/DI as intelligence support to the Planning Board. The list of questions which form the basis of the discussion were submitted by O/NE for approval in advance of the drafting of this paper. The question treated in Paragraph 7 was added to the O/NE list by the D/DI.

DOCUMENT NO. 42
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☒
☐ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S (C)
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1971
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 3/25/80 REVIEWER: 009256

~~TOP SECRET~~

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TOP SECRET

the use of force, necessary to prevent the USSR from successfully reimposing its control by force."

In making these studies the Planning Board will wish to consider certain questions of a largely intelligence character which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

2. What support would be found in the UN for US-supported proposals that the UN take "action, including the use of force, necessary to prevent the USSR from successfully reimposing its control by force?"

a. On the basis of the attitudes adopted by member states in the Hungarian issue, it seems clear that at least the bulk of the Arab-Asian bloc would not support any UN action against the USSR. The substantial majorities which were nevertheless recorded on the Hungarian resolutions would probably be retained for resolutions of condemnation, but these majorities would narrow and probably disappear entirely as proposals were made to advance up the scale of sanctions. It is highly unlikely that a majority could be obtained for use of force against the USSR.

b. The arguments which would be used against force, and which would probably be persuasive for a majority of members, would be that there was no way to apply force within Poland without attacking the USSR itself, that this would mean general war between the US and USSR, and that the UN would thus have made itself the instrumentality of bringing about what was

- 2 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

its principal mission to prevent. Refusal to authorize military action would be reinforced by the likelihood that the USSR would have achieved a military fait accompli in Poland while the above argument was proceeding in the UN Assembly.

3. On what judgments concerning the nature and extent of Soviet interests in Poland would the USSR be acting in the given case?

a. The Soviet leaders probably regard Poland, in the light of their military security interests, as the most essential of the Satellite states. Control of Polish territory is vital to the maintenance of their whole military position in Central Europe, which is built on the presence of large Soviet forces in Germany. Inability to maintain secure lines of communication to these forces would not only pose an immediate security risk in their view, but would also mean that a principal aim of Soviet policy, consistently followed throughout the postwar period -- to prevent a German settlement contrary to Soviet interests -- would be frustrated. It was because of these considerations that we argued in SNIE 12-3-56 that "the USSR would probably intervene with force in Poland before deterioration went as far as it did in Hungary."

b. While the Soviet stake in Poland is vital from a rational view of Soviet interests, there is another dimension involved in gauging the

- 3 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

extent of the Soviet commitment once the Soviet leaders had decided to intervene with force in Poland. They have probably been profoundly shaken by the Hungarian events. They probably regarded the obloquy heaped on them by world opinion and the moral setback to Communism and Soviet policy resulting from their actions in Hungary as tolerable only because the alternative of allowing Hungary to escape from Communist control seemed to them an even worse setback. There is therefore a high deterrent to repeating the Hungarian episode in Poland. If they nevertheless do so, it will probably be in a mood of extreme desperation. Thus they will not only be acting on what they regard as their vital interests, but in a state of mind in which they will not be inclined to weigh very coolly the external consequences of their action. There might therefore be a considerable element of the irrational in their reaction to an attempt at outside intervention.

4. On what estimate of the probable outside response would the USSR be acting in using military force against the Gomulka regime?

a. At present, it seems likely, on the basis of the UN's record of action on the Hungarian case, that the Soviet leaders would expect a new wave of revulsion by world opinion, embodied in UN condemnatory resolutions, but they would not expect these to be implemented with sanctions. Insofar as they considered this possibility at all, they would count heavily on the disunities provoked by the Suez crisis, between the Arab-Asian bloc and the West and also within the Western alliance, to prevent any UN action.

- 4 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

b. It is possible that this Soviet estimate would be altered if there should still be determined UN action in the Hungarian case or if a new crisis in Soviet-Polish relations developed slowly enough and openly enough for UN pressures to be applied in advance of Soviet military action. For example, if the USSR were expelled from the UN because of Hungary, if economic sanctions were applied, if UN members undertook military dispositions "in view of the serious threat to peace developing in Eastern Europe" -- such a series of pressures short of the ultimate threat would certainly have some deterrent effect on a Soviet resort to force against Poland. They might provide an extra margin of maneuver for the Polish regime in negotiations with the USSR which would in any case be balanced on a razor edge. But there could be no guarantee that the Soviet leaders, in view of what has been stated in Paragraph 3 above about their stake in Poland and the state of mind in which they would be acting, would not in the end convince themselves that they should not be deterred by prospects of UN action.

5. What would be the Soviet response to a UN demand to withdraw which carried with it the clear threat to resort to varying degrees of sanction including use of force?

If, contrary to the views expressed in Paragraph 2 about the likelihood of such UN action, the UN did in fact threaten sanctions, the Soviet response would depend upon the degree of sanction which was threatened. It is a

- 5 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

virtual certainty that the Soviet leaders, once they were actually involved in military action in Poland, would not withdraw on UN demand if they anticipated sanctions, however drastic, which did not include force. The costs of compliance, which would in these circumstances include definitive loss of control over Poland, would seem to them far greater than the costs of brazening out a UN attempt to apply limited sanctions. They would probably calculate that such sanctions would in any case be limited in duration as well as in effect.

If the UN demand was backed by a clear threat to use force in case of non-compliance, the Soviet response would rest on a calculation as to how determinedly and on what scale the UN would in fact act to apply force. It seems probable that, given the state of mind in which the Soviet leaders would be acting, they would still at this stage attempt to bluff, and this would be even more likely if they anticipated that the UN would attempt to use force locally rather than in a general attack on the USSR. It is probable that anything short of a clearly expressed US intention to seek enforcement by use of nuclear weapons would fail to obtain Soviet compliance. If the US did make such an intention clear, the estimate which in all reason must be made is that the USSR would comply. However, the incalculable and irrational factors at work in such a situation really make such an "estimate" meaningless. In fact, Soviet behavior could not be predicted with any reasonable degree of certainty.

- 6 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

6. What would the USSR do in response to UN-sanctioned force applied within and in the area of Poland?

If the UN was able to take action which did not engage directly the Soviet forces in Germany, and if it refrained from employment of nuclear weapons, the USSR would probably resist these efforts locally without extending the scale of conflict. It would then attempt to complete its military operations in Poland as quickly as possible and call for a cease-fire. If the UN action included use of nuclear weapons against Soviet forces within and in the area of Poland it is probable that the USSR would then agree to withdraw in the belief that the attack would soon be extended generally to the territory of the USSR. Again, however, this is a rational estimate in a situation in which irrational factors might well be governing.

7. What would be the consequences of Soviet reimposition of its control over Poland by force in defiance of UN protests (i.e., protests roughly equivalent to the UN actions on Hungary)?

Such a development would open up entirely new perspectives and its eventual consequences are virtually impossible to estimate without foreknowledge of the whole context of events in which it came about. This is said in the belief that the repercussions would be far more sweeping than those flowing and still to flow from the Soviet actions in Hungary. What is given below therefore is simply a speculative list of some possible developments:

- 7 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

a) Consequences for the USSR

The Soviet problem of maintaining its control in Eastern Europe would be enormously complicated. If Polish resistance were prolonged, there might be revolts in other Satellites, including East Germany. A considerable portion of Soviet military resources might be needed to control the area. Thus the whole Soviet military posture might be seriously weakened.

Even if the USSR succeeded in reestablishing a semblance of order in a reasonable time, it would probably have sacrificed for an indefinite period any hope of achieving political stability and economic productivity in the Satellite area as a whole.

What moral credit the USSR still has left in certain sectors of world opinion would be greatly reduced. In the West it has after Hungary not much to lose in this respect, although the blow delivered to the Communist parties by the Hungarian events would be magnified many times over. The losses in the Middle East and Asia, where Hungary had little visible impact, might finally become serious. In any case, Soviet diplomacy would be seriously crippled, and the USSR might find itself isolated. The break with Yugoslavia would probably become definitive and there might even be serious strains in Soviet relations with Communist China.

The effects on the Soviet internal situation are incalculable. A crisis within the leadership in which the disaffection of the military leadership also figured would be likely. The blow to Party morale and

- 8 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

confidence would be severe. How the general population would react -- because of fear of war, because of casualties in the forces, because of new disillusionments added to those about Stalin, because of conviction of the regime's weakness and confusion -- it is impossible to say. It is not inconceivable that a crisis within the leadership and Party could be transformed into a general crisis of the regime. To overcome such dangers and the handicaps to Soviet foreign policy referred to in the preceding paragraph, the Soviet leadership might resort to extreme adventurism in the Middle East or elsewhere.

b) Consequences for the US

The effects on attitudes toward the US would probably be mixed. In some quarters, especially in Asia, there would be applause for US restraint in not increasing the risks of war in such a situation. Elsewhere there would be a serious loss of moral standing and prestige, but at the same time renewed fear of the USSR would increase the demand for US defense leadership. These contradictory attitudes would be reflected in the NATO states, on the one hand by desires to reinforce the alliance and, on the other, by doubts that the US could be relied upon to resist Soviet aggression. These confusions would be the most acute in Germany. Even where the UN and US inaction on Poland was approved, the ability of the US to transform this into increased influence over the policies of other states would probably be limited. For example, the effectiveness of US

- 9 -

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

policy in working for a Middle East settlement would probably not be enhanced. By and large, unless the USSR was seriously weakened by its action against Poland, US ability to influence the course of events elsewhere would probably be diminished rather than heightened.

c) Consequences for the UN and Other Collective Arrangements

The authority of the UN and its usefulness from the point of view of US policy would be curtailed. Even now, the Arab-Asian states for the most part regard it as an instrument in their struggle against the former colonial powers, not as an organ of universal authority to which they are willing to entrust their interests. Support for the UN in this latter sense has come mainly from public opinion in Western states. The latter would be the members most disillusioned by the UN's inability to check the Soviet actions in Hungary and Poland. Their loss of confidence in it might be offset somewhat by a success for UN efforts at a settlement in the Middle East, but the chances for this do not seem bright at present and would be lessened by a failure of the UN to assert its authority in Eastern Europe. The possibilities for successful collective action through the UN against Communist aggression in future would probably be reduced. On the other hand, it is possible that, if doubts about US determination to resist Communist aggression did not run too deep, there would be an opportunity to strengthen NATO and perhaps other regional defense arrangements to which the US is a party.

- 10 -

TOP SECRET

~~TOP SECRET~~
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The Case of Soviet Military Intervention in Other Satellites

8. The considerations addressed to the case of Poland in the foregoing paragraphs would not be significantly different; except in degree, for the other Satellites. While other Satellite states are not as important to the military security of the USSR as Poland, the Soviet leaders would probably resort to military intervention to prevent the almost equally important political reverse resulting from overthrow of a Communist regime in the area. The estimate made in Paragraphs 5 and 6 above of Soviet reaction to a UN demand to withdraw or to various degrees of sanction including the use of force would have to be the same since Soviet power and prestige would be just as fully engaged as in the case of Poland. The situation might develop differently, however, if because of a differing geographical situation the UN was able to apply local force to aid a Satellite people which was maintaining military resistance to the USSR. The case of Albania would be unique, however. Because of geographical inaccessibility and complications affecting relations with Yugoslavia, the USSR probably would not attempt to intervene militarily against an anti-regime movement there.

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- 11 -

~~TOP SECRET~~
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